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MIRACLEMAN

№13

™

ALAN MOORE

JOHN TOTLEBEN

"AS IF ENJOYING EVENING'S BREEZE, THE AND/OROID STANDS ON A BALCONY WITH NEITHER BREEZE NOR EVENING, SUCH IDEAS UNKNOWN HERE SAVE BY **ABSENCES**; BY POIGNANT HOLES LEFT IN THE AND/OROID'S SMALL, ABSTRACT LIFE.

"THIS COMFORT IN A WORD UNSAID OR ARTIFACT UNREALIZED THEY CALL (01000000), WITH NO EQUIVALENT AMONGST THE TONGUES OF EARTH OR **OTHER** WORLDS.

"SINCE PROGRAMMING THE BASIC MODULE FOR SELF-REPLICATION AND IMPROVEMENT, COUNTLESS GENERATIONS HAVE, FROM RANDOM BYTES, CONJURED SOCIETY.

"I'VE WATCHED ITS HIGHER ATTRIBUTES EVOLVE: LANGUAGE, AESTHETICS, AND PHILOSOPHY, PANNED LIKE GOLD BY THESE PROSPECTING INTELLECTS FROM AN UNENDING BINARY FLOW OF ON AND OFF, AND YES AND NO.

"TWO HOURS PASS AND FIVE GENERATIONS, THE FIFTH FORMULATING FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS THAT CONCERN THEIR **ORIGINS**, THEIR WHOLE **EXISTENCE**.

"THE AND/OROID STANDS ON ITS BALCONY. THERE IS NO BREEZE OR EVENING, AND, DESPITE IMAGINED FACES IN THE ARTIFICIAL CLOUDS, NO WORD FOR **GOD**.

"NOT **YET**.

"I'M GIVING THEM 'TIL **LUNCH**.

"MY FINGERTIPS TRACE CONDENSATION LINES, SCRAWL PORTENTS ON THEIR FISHBOWL WORLD'S GLASS SKY.

"ALL LIFE CONFRONTS INFINITY WITH THIS SAME GOLDFISH STARE. MANKIND ONCE GAZED, COD-EYED, BEYOND THE ATMOSPHERE'S TRANSPARENT BOWL, WONDERING WHAT TRANSPIRED THERE, BENEATH NEW SUNS, IN DIFFERENT AIRS.

"MANKIND KNOWS BETTER NOW.

"OUR CONTACT WITH THE OUTER GODS SHATTERED OUR JAR OF **IGNORANCE**, WHICH SPILLED BEYOND RECALL.

"(01010000). THAT'S HOW THE AND/OROIDS DESCRIBE NOSTALGIA FOR A HOLE'S INTRIGUING SHAPE ONCE IT'S BEEN FILLED.

"THIS NOTION ONLY BLOSSOMS HERE, A FRUIT EXCLUSIVE TO THIS GRAND TERRARIUM OF FEELINGS AND IDEAS THEY CALL THE WORLD.

"FORSAKING MY EXQUISITE GLOBE, THINKING OF **OTHER** SPHERES, I JOURNEY UP TOWARDS THE HAUNTED ROOFTOP GARDENS OF OLYMPUS.

"BELOW, AN ALTERED ENGLAND PROSPERS IN THE AUGUST SUN, CHANGED LESS BY WONDERS FROM **ABOVE** THAN BY A DIFFERENT **ATTITUDE** TO MIRACLES ALREADY **THEIRS**.

"COMPUTER AND TELECOMMUNICATION WEBS MAKE EARTH A PLACE WHERE **DISTANCE** IS **IRRELEVANT**, AND YET IT TOOK WARPSMITH PHILOSOPHIES TO DEMONSTRATE THE **VIRTUES** OF AN INSTANTANEOUS **WORLD**.

"NO **CITIES**, CONCENTRATING JOBS AND LIVES INTO ONE CRAMMED ENVIRONMENT, WHEN **SCREENS** CAN TAKE THE OFFICE INTO EVERY **HOME**. NO **BORDERS** IN THE ELECTRONIC STATE, WHERE JOKES IN ABERDEEN RAISE LAUGHTER IN JAPAN.

"FACTS AND FORTUNES BECOME PULSES, IMMATERIAL STREAMS ENCIRCLING EARTH, FLOWING AT THOUGHTSPEED, AT VELOCITIES THAT LEAVE ALL PREVIOUS GODS OF SWIFTNESS STANDING, NEEDING **FASTER** DEITIES, A JET-AGE **MERCURY** FOR ADEQUATE **COMPARISONS**.

"ATOP ITS THOUSAND STEPS, THE GARDEN SHIVERS IN THE STRATOSPHERIC WIND.

"IMPORTED FLESHFERNS FROM ALDEBARAN WILL FLATTER BENEFACTORS BY PRODUCING BLOOMS THAT IMITATE THEIR BODY-PARTS: EARFLOWERS TILT TOWARDS THE AVARICIOUS RUSTLINGS OF A FINGERTREE, WHILE TONGUEBEDS GLISTEN IN THE SUMMER LIGHT.

"SPECTRES PARADE, FRIENDS OF THE ONE COMMEMORATED HERE. DISTANCE IS MEANINGLESS TO THEM. WHEREVER THEY TREAD IN THIS UNIVERSE, THEIR IMAGE IS CONTRIVED TO SILENTLY PATROL THESE PATHWAYS, MUTE, UNSEEING, PASSING THROUGH EACH OTHER WHEN THEY MEET, REPEATING GESTURES HAPPENING LIGHT-YEARS HENCE.

"ON EARTH, SEE HEAVEN'S MARVELS, SENT DOWN BY THE GODS IN THE KEEPING OF THEIR FLEETEST SERVANT, HE WHO STRODE THE STARS ON WINGLESS HEELS, UTOPIA'S SECRETS LOCKED BENEATH HIS WINGLESS HELM.

"AS ALL MUST DO WHO VENTURE HERE, I SIT AMONGST OBLIVIOUS GHOSTS AND I REMEMBER HIM; THE ENVOY OF THE GODS; THE MESSENGER OF THE DIVINE...

"...THE QUICK.

"THE DEAD."

MIRACLEMAN

CHAPTER III

HERMES

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CHORN

ALAN MOORE
Writer

JOHN TOTLEBEN
Artist

WAYNE TRUMAN
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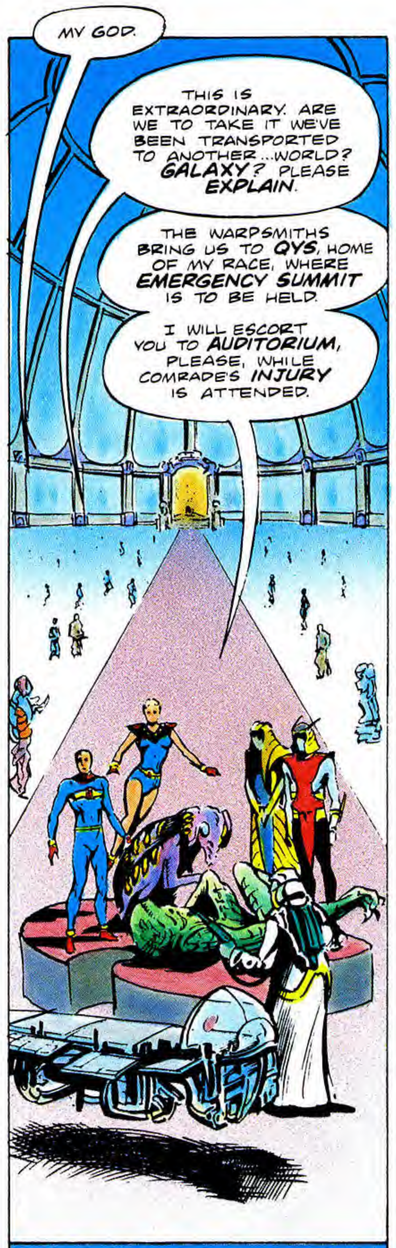
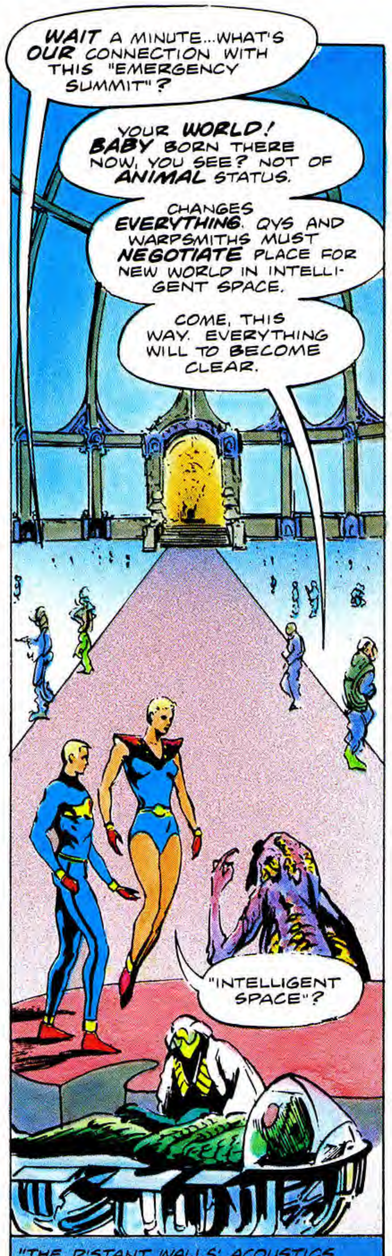
"ALMOST FIVE YEARS AGO NOW, SINCE THE FIRST TIME THAT WE MET, WHEN FIRST I WAS TRANSPORTED BY HIS POWER. ALL I RECALL IS MY WIFE STUMBLING FORWARD, REACHING OUT...

"...THEN THREE BLUE SECONDS...

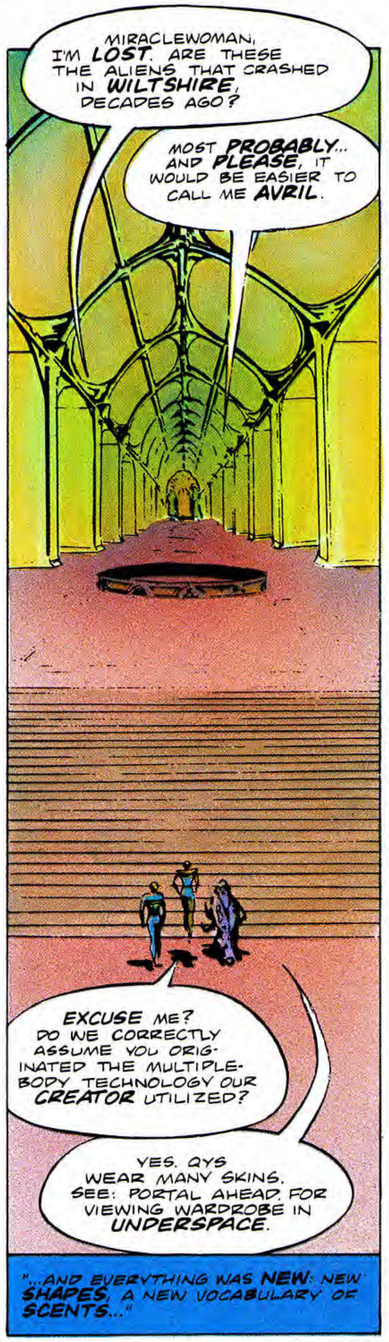
"...THEN MYTHOLOGY."


MY GOD.
THIS IS EXTRAORDINARY. ARE WE TO TAKE IT WE'VE BEEN TRANSPORTED TO ANOTHER...WORLD? GALAXY? PLEASE EXPLAIN.
THE WARPSMITHS BRING US TO QYS, HOME OF MY RACE, WHERE EMERGENCY SUMMIT IS TO BE HELD.
I WILL ESCORT YOU TO AUDITORIUM, PLEASE, WHILE COMRADES INJURY IS ATTENDED.

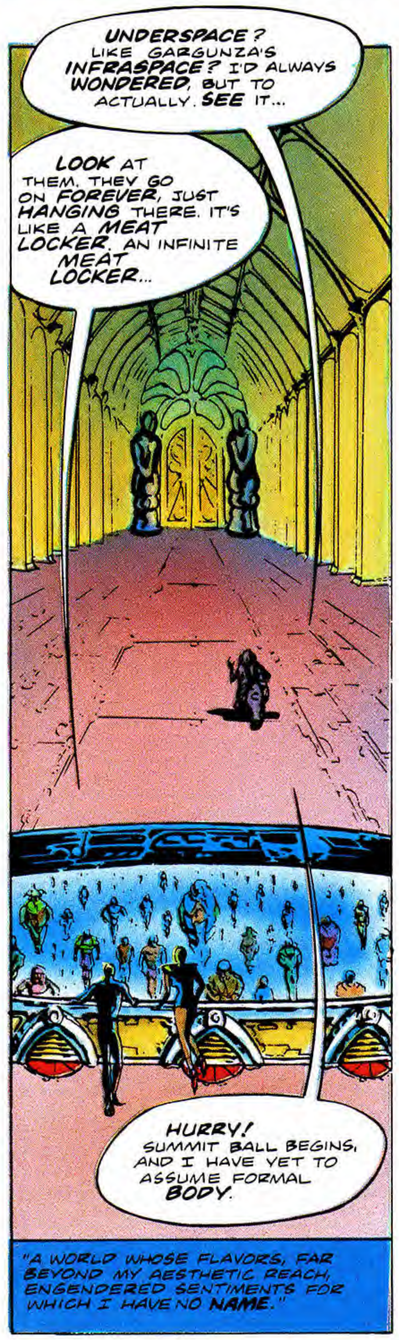
"THAT PLACE. BUILT BY SUCH MINDS, THEIR ATTITUDE TO SPACE LAID BARE WITHIN ITS EVERY LINE."


WAIT A MINUTE...WHAT'S OUR CONNECTION WITH THIS "EMERGENCY SUMMIT"?
YOUR WORLD! BABY BORN THERE NOW, YOU SEE? NOT OF ANIMAL STATUS.
CHANGES EVERYTHING. QYS AND WARPSMITHS MUST NEGOTIATE PLACE FOR NEW WORLD IN INTELLIGENT SPACE.
COME, THIS WAY. EVERYTHING WILL TO BECOME CLEAR.
"INTELLIGENT SPACE"?

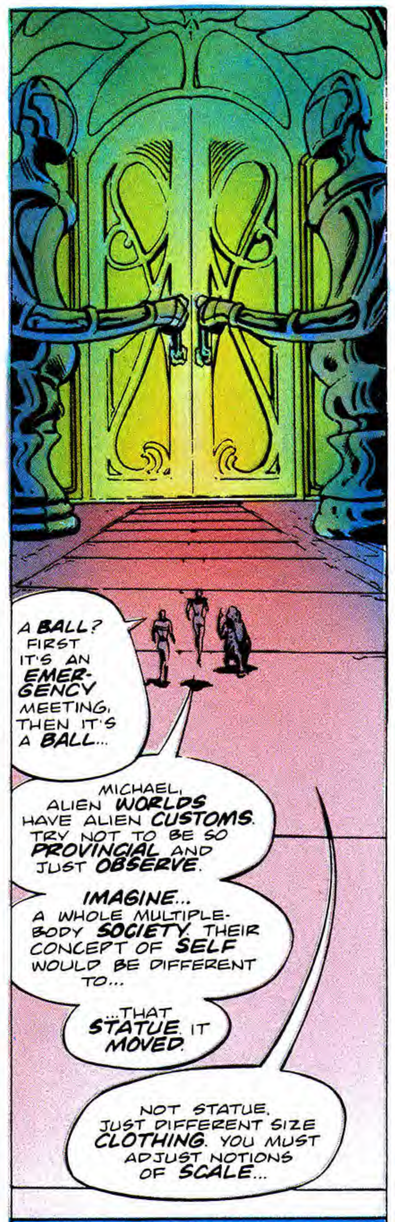
"THE DISTANT WALLS' ACOUSTICS MADE A TAPELOOP OF EACH SOUND EACH SOUND, EACH WORD WORD: THE DISTANT DISTANT WALLS..."


MIRACLEWOMAN, I'M LOST. ARE THESE THE ALIENS THAT CRASHED IN WILTSHIRE, DECADES AGO?
MOST PROBABLY... AND PLEASE, IT WOULD BE EASIER TO CALL ME AVRIL.
EXCUSE ME? DO WE CORRECTLY ASSUME YOU ORIGINATED THE MULTIPLE-BODY TECHNOLOGY OUR CREATOR UTILIZED?
YES. QYS WEAR MANY SKINS. SEE: PORTAL AHEAD, FOR VIEWING WARDROBE IN UNDERSPACE.

"...AND EVERYTHING WAS NEW: NEW SHAPES, A NEW VOCABULARY OF SCENTS..."


UNDERSPACE? LIKE GARGUNZA'S INFRASPACE? I'D ALWAYS WONDERED, BUT TO ACTUALLY. SEE IT...
LOOK AT THEM. THEY GO ON FOREVER, JUST HANGING THERE. IT'S LIKE A MEAT LOCKER. AN INFINITE MEAT LOCKER...
HURRY! SUMMIT BALL BEGINS, AND I HAVE YET TO ASSUME FORMAL BODY.

"A WORLD WHOSE FLAVORS, FAR BEYOND MY AESTHETIC REACH, ENGENDERED SENTIMENTS FOR WHICH I HAVE NO NAME."


A BALL? FIRST IT'S AN EMERGENCY MEETING, THEN IT'S A BALL...
MICHAEL, ALIEN WORLDS HAVE ALIEN CUSTOMS. TRY NOT TO BE SO PROVINCIAL AND JUST OBSERVE.
IMAGINE... A WHOLE MULTIPLE-BODY SOCIETY. THEIR CONCEPT OF SELF WOULD BE DIFFERENT TO...
...THAT STATUE. IT MOVED.
NOT STATUE. JUST DIFFERENT SIZE CLOTHING. YOU MUST ADJUST NOTIONS OF SCALE...

"PERHAPS OUR OTHERWORLDLY ESCORT'S WORDS DESCRIBE IT BEST."

"WITHIN HIR ARTIFICIAL INLAND SEA OF NUTRIENT BROTH, THE GLORIOUS **KINGQUEEN** OF THE QYS HELD COURT.

"'**HIR**,' WHILE LESS FLATTERING THAN THE POSSESSIVE PRONOUN EMPLOYED BY THE QYS, REMAINS, I FEAR, THE BEST TRANSLATION THAT I HAVE TO HAND, AND SHOULD THE COINAGE IRRITATE, I MUST APOLOGISE WHILE STILL REFUSING TO MALIGN A CREATURE AS SUBLIME AS THIS WITH ANY BASE AND CASUAL SLUR LIKE 'IT'.

"A PHOSPHORESCENT CANCER THAT ASPIRED TO BE A **CONTINENT**, HIR LIGHT DAPPLED THE FURTHEST REACHES OF THE AUDITORIUM'S DOME, WHILE PLATFORMS HOLDING FIFTY SOULS OR MORE REVOLVED ABOUT HIR, BOTH IN ORBIT AND IN AUDIENCE. WAS THIS, THEN, OUR **TRIBUNAL?**

"I STEPPED ABOARD A PLATFORM. SHE DECLINED, FLOATING BESIDE US AS OUR TRANSPORT DRIFTED DOWN TOWARDS THE LUMINOUS LEVIATHAN BELOW.

"HOW MUCH AT HOME, AT EASE, SHE SEEMED IN THAT UNREAL, CELESTIAL PLACE."

WHAT **IS** THAT CREATURE? IS IT **SENTIENT?**

SUPREMELY SO. IT IS HIR MAJESTY, THE KINGQUEEN OF OUR RACE, HIR BODY THE MOST PERFECTLY EVOLVED AND BEAUTIFUL IN ALL CREATION.

THAT'S THE PERFECT BODY?

OF COURSE: SUPREME IN **SIZE**, INVULNERABLE, LOCKED IN PERPETUAL **ECSTACY**, COMBINED WITH SOUL AND INTELLECT OF SIZE COMPARABLE TO THAT OF HIR CORPOREAL MASS. WHAT COULD IMPROVE ON THIS?

UH, WELL, I SUPPOSE...

THAT PLATFORM **BELOW**... ARE THOSE PEOPLE **DANCING?**

YES. THE SUMMIT'S OPENING BALL, TO SET THE PROPER ATMOSPHERE FOR THE IMPORTANT WORDS TO FOLLOW. EACH PARTICIPANT MUST MOUNT A GRAND DISPLAY OF **DANCE**...

INCLUDING YOUR FRIENDS THE **WARPSMITHS?**

YOU MISUNDERSTAND. THE WARPSMITHS ARE OUR BITTEREST **ENEMIES.**

INTELLIGENT SPACE IS DIVIDED BETWEEN THE **QYS IMPERIUM** AND THE **GULF WORLD'S CONFEDERACY**, UNDER **WARPSMITH** RULE.

IN PERPETUAL COLDWAR **DEADLOCK**, OUR VAST EMPIRES **CO-EXIST**; HAVE DONE SO FOR ELEVEN THOUSAND **YEARS.**

I FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE A RACE AS POWERFUL AS YOUR OWN COULDN'T HAVE BROKEN THE DEADLOCK BEFORE NOW...

AHH, BUT YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE **WARPSMITHS.** YOU SEE, THE WARPSMITHS ARE **FAST**...

YES. YES, IT APPEARS THEY **ARE**...

LET'S HOPE WE HAVEN'T KEPT THEM WAITING **LONG.**

"WE'D LEFT THEM IN THE HALL WHERE WE **ARRIVED**, YET HERE THEY STOOD TO **GREET** US, FAINT AMUSEMENT WRINKLING THE WOMAN'S DOVE-GRAY CHEEKS, WHILE IRRITATION CREASED THE MAN'S WHITE **BROW.**"

EVERYONE KEEPS WARPSMITHS WAITING. IS THEIR CURSE, ONE DRAWBACK TO THEIR SPEED: TO THEM, ALL OTHER RACES ARE PAINFULLY SLOW.

THEIR MASTERY OF **SPACE** MATCHES OUR **OWN** MANIPULATION OF **IDENTITY.** THEIR POWER IS...

SI-LENCE.

A-GENT-OF-THE-QYS-STAND-FORTH.

WE-WILL-COM-MUN-I-CATE-IN-IN-GUL-ISH-FOR-THE-CON-VEE-NEE-ENCE-OF-OUR-TE-REST-REE-AL-GUESTS.

A-GENT-OF-THE-QYS-WHY-ARE-YOU-NOT-AT-TIRED-IN-BO-DEE-WEAR-MORE-FOR-MAL-AND-A-PRO-PREE-AT?

YOUR PARDON, MAJESTY. I'VE HAD NO OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE. WILL MAKE REPAIR AT ONCE:

IT-IS-GOOD.

PLEASE-NOW-TO-PRO-VIDE-ALL-DEE-TAILS-OF-MI-SHUN-TO-PLA-NET-EARTH.

IT IS MY HONOR, MAJESTY

SENT ON A **FIREDRAKE SWEEP,** THE QYS SHIP **GLA** CRASHED INTO PLANET EARTH, WITH ALL HANDS LOST.

INVESTIGATING, WE DISCOVERED SIX EARTH BEASTS HAD BEEN TRANSFORMED BY DEBASED QYS **TECHNOLOGY.** THREE OF THESE CUCKOOS NOW ARE DEAD, TWO MORE ARE HERE.

AND-OF-THE-SIXTH-WHAT-NEWS?

WELL?

SPEAK-FORTH-A-GENT-OF-THE-QYS. YOUR-KING-QUEEN-WAITS-TO-HEAR-HIR-ANSWER...

WELL, JOHNNY? WE'RE WAITING FOR AN **ANSWER.**

JOHNNY, UNLESS YOU TRUST US ENOUGH TO TELL THE **TRUTH** ABOUT YOUR PAST, WE CAN'T **HELP** YOU...

OF **COURSE** YOU CAN'T HELP HIM, YOU FLOPPY UDDERED **COW**, BUT **ME**...

...NOW, **I** COULD HELP HIM.

B-BUT I **HAVE** TOLD THE TRUTH.

THAT YOU'VE AN EVIL OTHER SELF SO FRIGHTENING YOU CAN'T EVEN SPEAK HIS **NAME**? JOHNNY, LOVE, COME **ON**...

WE NEED MORE THAN **THAT.**

YOU OLD **FART**, **I'LL** GIVE YOU **MORE!** PERHAPS EXAMINE **YOUR** MIND, EH?

JUST SAY THE WORD, JOHNNY...

LOOK, YOU GO AWAY AND THINK ABOUT WHAT I'VE **SAID**, AND IF YOU FEEL YOU CAN BE MORE **OPEN** WITH **ME**, THEN MY DOOR'S ALWAYS OPEN TO **YOU.** FAIR **ENOUGH?**

GOOD LAD.

MEMO

SEE HOW IT **IS?** THESE SANCTIMONIOUS TURDS CAN'T **HELP** YOU, AND YOU WON'T LET **ME** HELP...

...SO YOU'RE ON YOUR **OWN**, JOHNNY.

ALL ON YOUR **OWN.**

THE **SIXTH** CUCKOO IS **ISOLATED**, MAJESTY, LOCKED IN A **HRUMU TRANCE.** IN OUR OPINION, HE IS LIKELY TO REMAIN **INERT.**

HE IS NO **THREAT.**

THIS-IS-FOR-CHOO-NAT. PRO-CEED-WITH-YOUR-AC-COUNT.

CERTAINLY.

WE WOULD ROUTINELY HAVE DESTROYED THE CUCKOOS, BUT ONE HAD FATHERED CHILD FROM FEMALE **EARTHBEAST**.

UNLIKE **OURSELVES**, THESE THINGS ARE **FERTILE, VIABLE**.

RESULTANT BABY UNDENIABLY INTELLIGENT-CLASS NATIVE LIFE, MAKING EARTH INTELLIGENT-CLASS **WORLD**.

SO...

...A-NEW-WORLD-IN-IN-TELL-I-GENT-SPACE...

...THE-FIRST-WE'VE-FOUND-SINCE-OUR-TWO-EM-PIRES-MET: A-WORLD-IN-TELL-I-GENT-YET-UN-A-LIGNED.

BY-LAW-WE-MUST-AL-LOW-IT-TO-EX-IST, YET-HOW-IS-IT-TO-FIT-WI-THIN-THE-DE-LI-CAT-MA-SHEEN-OF-IN-TER-STEL-LAR-PO-LI-TICS?

DO-OUR-WARP-SMITH-GUESTS-HAVE-EH-NEE-O-PI-NEE-ON?

WHITE **WARRIOR-CLASS** WARPSMITH SUGGESTS POSSIBILITY OF CONFLICT OVER THIS NEW PLANET.

WHAT ARE THEY **SAYING**?

THE GRAY **DIPLOMAT** IMPLIES THAT BY HARBOURING CREATURES ORIG-INATED FROM QYS TECHNOLOGY, THE NEW PLANET IS UNFAIRLY INFLUENCED BY **QYS**.

HOW-PRE-DIC-TA-BUL.

THE-WARP-SMITH-KNOWS-HIS-MA-STERS-ARE-AS-TIRED-OF-THIS-PER-PET-U-AL-RI-VAL-REE-AS-I-MY-SELF, YET-OF-FERS-OWN-LEE-TALK-OF-FUR-THER-CON-FLICT.

ARE-BOTH-CUL-TURES-FOR-E-VER-DOOMED, THEN, TO-AN-UN-PRO-DUC-TIVE-WAR'S-DULL-TOIL?

EXCUSE ME...

...BUT COULDN'T YOU HAVE SEX, INSTEAD?

"HAVE-SEX?"

AVRIL, WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO **DO**? THOSE WARPSMITHS LOOK **FURIOUS**. IF THEY **UNDERSTOOD**...

THEY WEAR TRANSLATOR-PHONES. THEIR GESTURES INDICATE THAT YOU HAVE JUST INSULTED THEM. THEY THREATEN TO...

...NO. WAIT...

...THEY APOLOGIZE FOR **MISUNDERSTANDING** YOU. THEIR **TRANSLATORS** HAVE JUST RELAYED AN ADDITIONAL LAYER OF POSSIBLE **MEANING** TO THEM. IT SEEMS TO **PACIFY** THEM.

"HAVE-SEX".

YES. I-BE-GIN-TO-SEE-THE-POSS-I-BIL-I-TEES-OF-YOUR-I-DEA.

DAMNED IF I DO.

IT'S **OBVIOUS**. IF TWO **ORGANISMS** OR TWO **CULTURES** ARE FORCED INTO **CONTACT**, IT CAN BE **THANATIC** AND **DESTRUCTIVE**, OR **EROTIC** AND **CREATIVE**.

YOU-SUH-JEST-OUR-CUL-TURES-MA-REE, U-SING-YOUR-NEU-TRAL-PLA-NET-FOR-OUR-COURT-SHIP.

AN-IM-PRESS-IVE CON-CEPT.

DE-SPITE-YOUR-UG-LI-NESS, MAY-I-COM-PLI-MENT-YOUR-THIN-KING?

ALL-SO, YOUR-DEE-EN-AY-SPY-RALS-ARE-VE-REE-PRI-TEE.

I-MUST-CON-SULT-MY-AD-VI-SORS. GO-NOW.

"STILL DAZZLED BY OUR AUDIENCE, WE RETURNED THE WAY WE CAME, COMING AT LAST TO FAR AWAY **RECEPTION ROOMS**.

"THE **WARPSMITHS** WERE THERE, WAITING FOR US.

"PERHAPS AS A RESULT OF THEIR ABILITY TO TRAVEL **PARSECS** WITH A SINGLE **THOUGHT**, I NOTICED THAT THEY HARDLY MOVED AT **ALL**. THEIR STILLNESS AND THEIR SOAPSTONE FLESH CONSPIRED TO LEND THEM THE APPEARANCE OF **BEAUTIFUL** CARVEN FIGURINES.

"BALANCING THEIR REMOTENESS, AVRIL ENERGETICALLY INTERROGATED OUR ESCORT.

"SHE ASKED ABOUT OUR **COSTUMES**... LIVING CREATURES, IT TRANSPIRED, THAT CHANGE RESPONDING TO THE WEARER'S **THOUGHTS**. SHE ASKED THINGS I'D NOT **THOUGHT** OF, BARELY EVEN **GRASPED**. THAT **MIND**. THAT THIRSTY **INTELLECT**...

"DID I FIRST LOVE HER THEN?

"MY OWN EMOTIONS WERE TOO **INCOHERENT** TO RECALL, DESPITE MY LIFE **BEFORE** THAT POINT. THE SITUATION SEEMED **UNREAL**; A VIVID, FEVERISH **DREAM**.

"IN RETROSPECT, THAT'S WHEN REALITY FIRST SEEMED LIKE A **MIRAGE**, CHANGING WITHOUT REGARD FOR RULES.

"IT'S A PERCEPTION THAT'S SINCE **GROWN**.

"EVENTUALLY, A VERDICT CAME: EARTH WOULD REMAIN UNINTERFERED WITH, THOUGH OBSERVED BY BOTH SIDES IN A MUTUAL SURVEILLANCE THAT WOULD TEST FURTHER CO-OPERATION'S VIABILITY.

"AVRIL AND I WOULD OBSERVE FOR THE **QYS**, TWO **WARPSMITH** AGENTS ALSO SENT TO WATCH, MAINTAINING **PARITY**.

"THE WARPSMITH OBSERVATION POST WOULD BE CONCEALED BEHIND EARTH'S **MOON**. WE WOULD OCCASIONALLY LIAISE, REPORTING THROUGH THEM TO THE **QYS**.

"ONE WARPSMITH, THE WHITE **WARRIOR**, WE'D **MET**. THE OTHER, CURRENTLY NEAR **ARCTURUS**, WOULD SOON BE SUMMONED, BRIEFED AND INTRODUCED.

"I WAS RESIGNED TO YET ANOTHER **WAIT**...

"...WHEN SHE **APPEARED**. **PHON MOODA** WAS HER NAME. WHITE SKINNED; A WARRIOR; SHE SEEMED TOO **ELEGANT** FOR **VIOLENCE**...

"...BUT DON'T WE **ALL**?

"INTRODUCED, WE ARRANGED TO **MEET**, BUT FIRST THE WARPSMITHS WOULD TRANSPORT AVRIL AND ME BACK TO OUR SEPARATE **RESIDENCES**.

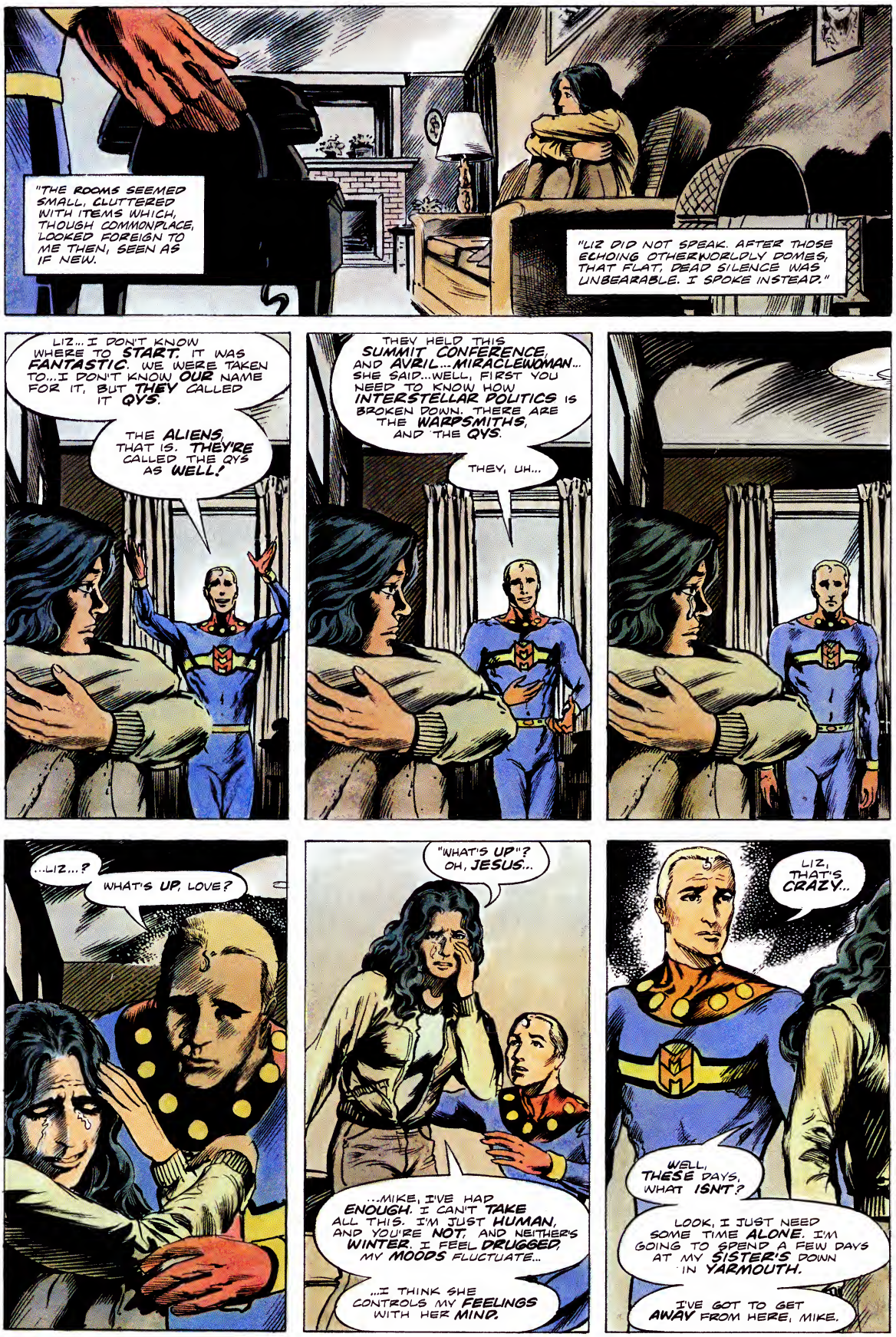
"NOT WITHOUT **RELIEF**, WE SAID **GOODBYE**.

"THE WARPSMITHS GESTURED AS IF **FOLDING** SOMETHING: ONLY LATER DID I UNDERSTAND THAT IT WAS **US**.

"REALITY'S **FRAIL BACKDROP** CRUMPLED. THROUGH THE SCENERY WE PLUNGED INTO THE ULTRA-VIOLET REACHES OF THAT SOLID SPECTRUM AGAINST WHICH WE MEASURE **SPACE**.

"I CLOSED MY EYES. WHEN NEXT I OPENED THEM, I WAS ALONE, AND IN THE WORLD AGAIN...

"...AND **HOME**.


"THE ROOMS SEEMED SMALL, CLUTTERED WITH ITEMS WHICH, THOUGH COMMONPLACE, LOOKED FOREIGN TO ME THEN, SEEN AS IF NEW.
"LIZ DID NOT SPEAK. AFTER THOSE ECHOING OTHERWORLDLY DOMES, THAT FLAT, DEAD SILENCE WAS UNBEARABLE. I SPOKE INSTEAD."
LIZ... I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START. IT WAS FANTASTIC. WE WERE TAKEN TO... I DON'T KNOW OUR NAME FOR IT, BUT THEY CALLED IT QYS.
THE ALIENS, THAT IS. THEY'RE CALLED THE QYS AS WELL!
THEY HELD THIS SUMMIT CONFERENCE, AND AVRIL... MIRACLEWOMAN... SHE SAID... WELL, FIRST YOU NEED TO KNOW HOW INTERSTELLAR POLITICS IS BROKEN DOWN. THERE ARE THE WARPSMITHS, AND THE QYS.
THEY, UH...
...LIZ...?
WHAT'S UP, LOVE?
"WHAT'S UP"? OH, JESUS...
...MIKE, I'VE HAD ENOUGH. I CAN'T TAKE ALL THIS. I'M JUST HUMAN, AND YOU'RE NOT, AND NEITHER'S WINTER. I FEEL DRUGGED, MY MOODS FLUCTUATE...
...I THINK SHE CONTROLS MY FEELINGS WITH HER MIND.
LIZ, THAT'S CRAZY...
WELL, THESE DAYS, WHAT ISN'T?
LOOK, I JUST NEED SOME TIME ALONE. I'M GOING TO SPEND A FEW DAYS AT MY SISTER'S DOWN IN YARMOUTH.
I'VE GOT TO GET AWAY FROM HERE, MIKE.

LIZ, THIS IS SO **SUDDEN**. CAN'T WE **TALK**?

LATER. LATER WE'LL TALK.

I'VE THOUGHT IT THROUGH, AND I HAVE TO LEAVE **NOW**. I **LOVE** YOU, MIKE. I LOVE **BOTH** OF YOU. I'LL BE BACK SOON.

FATHER?

I THINK IT'S TIME WE DISCUSSED **MOTHER**, DON'T YOU?

"FIVE YEARS AGO NOW.

"FIVE SHORT YEARS SINCE, FIRST I WALKED ON OTHER WORLDS OR HEARD THE VOICE OF **WINTER**.

"FIVE SHORT YEARS THAT HAVE SEEN MORE CHANGE THAN HAVE THE LAST FIVE **CENTURIES**. SO MUCH IS **DIFFERENT** NOW. SO MUCH IS **GONE**...

"...DEAR LIZ. WHEN DID I LAST EMBRACE A BODY THAT WAS **DELICATE**, A BODY I MUST TAKE CARE NOT TO **INJURE** OR **BREAK**? YOUR LOVE WAS SIMPLE, ANIMAL AND CLEAN. I MISS IT. MISS IT STILL.

"SWEET **WINTER**. GLORIOUS CHILD, YOU WERE **BEYOND** ME EVEN **THEN**, AND IN THAT MOMENT THAT YOU SPOKE I KNEW WHAT PARENTS RARELY LEARN UNTIL THEIR BABES ARE ALMOST **GROWN**: I KNEW YOU WERE NOT **OWNED**. I KNEW YOU WERE NOT **MINE**, AND IN THAT MOMENT YOU WERE **GONE**.

"AND **AZA CHORN**, SO **SWIFT** THAT BY COMPARE THE THUNDERBOLTS CREPT EARTHWARDS WITH THE SPEED OF **STALACTITES**...?

"WHY, AZA CHORN IS DEAD.

"JUST DEAD.

"ABOUT HIS MONUMENT, THE GHOSTS PARADE. THE ZEPHYRS SHRIEK AND HOWL AND TEAR APART THE CLOUDS, RAIL USELESSLY AT DEATH AND IN FRUSTRATION SNATCH UP BLOSSOMS SHAPED LIKE HUMAN LIPS, AND FLING THEM LIKE BLOOD-RED CONFETTI FROM OLYMPUS TO THOSE MORTAL PASTURES FAR BELOW, A RAIN OF ANGRY KISSES SHOWERING DOWN UPON THOSE TINY, DISTANT LIVES...

"...[11010000]: THE ANDROIDS USE THIS TERM TO DENOTE THE SORROW THAT IS FELT ON REALIZING SORROW IS A THING ONE CAN NO LONGER TRULY FEEL.

"ONE ONE, OH ONE, OH OH, OH OH."

TO BE CONTINUED.